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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine whether Vocational Education and Training in Schools programs, and in particular, structured workplace learning (SWL) programs in Australia were successful in leading students to employment or further education. A total of 8,249 school leavers who left school in 1999 (15 percent of total school leavers) and had been involved in SWL programs in years 11 or 12 responded to a survey about their post-school experiences. Slightly more females than males replied. They had attended a total of 24 different industry-related SWL programs. The study found that about 10 percent of the respondents were in part-time work only; about 40 percent were in full-time employment, and just over 33 percent were in full-time school. About 7 percent were unemployed and about 2 percent were not actively seeking work or engaged in a combination of part-time studies and other activities. The results were also encouraging in that a large proportion of leavers found work in their area of study. The study concluded that the great majority of students who have participated in SWL programs are obtaining employment or going into further studies. However, the study cautioned against automatic conclusions that these outcomes are directly caused by participation in SWL programs. It is possible that the more enterprising students also see the advantages of taking SWL courses and reap the rewards because of these specific attributes. (KC)

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# Destinations of school leavers who participated in structured workplace learning programs

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This paper reports the destinations of school leavers who participated in structured workplace learning (SWL) programs funded by the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) - formerly the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation.

## Background

There has been a concerted effort to provide school students (especially in the senior years) with vocational education and training (VET). SWL provides options for all students to attain enterprise skills and entry-level qualifications which will help them with career options, employment or industry-specific accreditation towards further study.

VET in Schools programs have also been introduced as a means of providing incentives for students, who may be at risk of leaving school early, to stay on at school and complete their secondary schooling. This is because year 12 non-completers have been found to be especially disadvantaged in the labour market. They often spend more time in unemployment than year 12 completers for the same amount of time out of school. Although the unemployment rate declines for both groups the longer they spend in the labour market, it tends to decline more quickly for year 12 completers in the second year out of school (DEETYA 1997).

## Students in ECEF-funded programs

The ECEF was established by a grant from the Commonwealth Government to promote opportunities for young Australians to acquire workplace knowledge and experience before they graduate from school.

McIntyre and Pithers (2001) have traced the growth of these programs. Their data shows that there has been an explosion in the number of students in ECEF-supported programs in every State and Territory since 1995. In 1995 there were 2800 students in such programs nationwide and by 2000 this had increased to just over 80 000. McIntyre and Pithers forecast that by 2001 there will be just over 100 000 students in these programs.

## Structured workplace learning

Structured workplace learning (SWL) programs comprise on-the-job and off-the-job training components. The on-the-job components, which include pre-determined learning outcomes agreed prior to the work placements, are delivered in workplaces by employers or their representatives. The off-the-job components are delivered in the classroom, either by school teachers who have the necessary experience and



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qualifications to deliver the training, or teachers from TAFE institutes or other registered training organisations.

SWL programs typically involve a cluster of schools coming together to provide SWL experiences for their students. These clusters are generally managed by committees of local stakeholders including employers, schools, training providers and community organisations. In some cases student representatives are also on cluster management committees. The day-to-day operations of the cluster are usually conducted by a program coordinator who has generally been hired to coordinate the activities of the cluster and liaise with students, their teachers and employers. The main role of the coordinator, however, is to locate and negotiate work placements for students, assist employers to prepare for these placements, and maintain networks with employers and community organisations, for the location of further placements.

In 2000 the ECEF supported about 250 SWL programs. Because of the school cluster approach to organisation, this meant that there were almost 2000 schools across Australia involved in providing SWL opportunities for students.

The main focus of SWL in these programs is the work placement. Students participate in work placements for a period of between 5-20 days in the final years of their schooling. However, the duration of work placements also depends on local program arrangements, and requirements laid down by Boards of Studies or their equivalents in the different States and Territories.

**The benefits of SWL**

Lamb et al (1998) and Misko (1998) have examined the employment outcomes of students in VET in Schools programs. Their findings indicate that considerable numbers of young people participating in SWL are often offered part-time or full-time employment, including apprenticeships and traineeships, as a result of being involved in work placements. Misko (1995) found that employers were keen to be involved in providing placements for students because they saw this as a means to improving their public image, fulfilling their community responsibility and recruiting suitable employees. Teachers have also reported an improved and more committed attitude to their general schoolwork from many of the students involved in SWL.

In addition, students generally enjoy the opportunity to develop workplace skills, mix with other workers, and find out whether they are suited to the particular industry or occupation (Misko 1998; Teese et al 1997). Another key benefit for students are the opportunities for them to gain industry-recognised qualifications within the Australian Recognition Framework, which can be used to articulate into further training.

Feedback from parents with a SWL connection has also been positive about the benefits to students. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) 2000 Parent Perceptions of School-Industry Programs research commissioned by the ECEF indicates that more than 80% of parents with experience of SWL programs would recommend such programs to other parents (Misko et al 1998).

## About the study

One way to determine whether or not VET in Schools programs, and in particular SWL programs have been successful, is to examine whether or not they have led to employment or encouraged students to stay on at school. This study was based on a questionnaire survey of students who left school in 1999 and had participated in SWL programs in years 11 and 12. Exit students were contacted by ECEF-funded coordinators in March 2000, either working independently or in conjunction with teachers from schools.

Students were required to provide details about their participation in SWL programs, current employment and/or further studies, and whether their SWL programs which included a work placement had helped them to find their current jobs.

### Respondents

A total of 8249 school leavers who left school in 1999 and had been involved in ECEF-funded SWL program(s) in years 11 or 12 (either in 1998 or 1999) responded to the survey. The sample represents approximately 15% of the 1999 school leavers who had participated in ECEF-funded programs. There were slightly more females (52.3%) than males (47.7%).

Over nine in ten (92.4%) students had attended a coeducational school. A small percentage (5.2%) had attended all-female schools and almost half this proportion (2.4%) had attended all-male schools.

The overwhelming majority (80.8%) of respondents had undertaken year 12 in 1999. Just under a fifth (17.8%) had undertaken year 11, and a minimal percentage (0.6%) had been involved in year 13.

### SWL industry programs

A total of 24 different industry-related SWL programs were identified. Of these, the ten most popular programs are presented in Table 1. For about 20% of respondents the industry sector was not identified.

In Table 1 and in all other tables dealing with industry sectors, the analysis is based on the first SWL program identified by respondents. This is because in the majority of cases this represents the major part of the involvement.

**Table 5: Student participation in SWL industry programs**

| | No. of students in programs | % of students |
|---|---|---|
| Hospitality | 1949 | 23.6 |
| Office/finance/banking and insurance | 887 | 10.8 |
| Retail/wholesale | 600 | 7.3 |
| Building and construction | 496 | 6.0 |
| Community services and health | 452 | 5.4 |
| IT, printing and communication | 408 | 4.9 |
| Metals and engineering | 397 | 4.8 |
| Automotive | 390 | 4.7 |
| Primary industries | 319 | 3.9 |
| Light manufacturing | 209 | 2.5 |
| Tourism | 186 | 2.3 |
| Fitness, sport and recreation | 133 | 1.6 |
| Arts and entertainment | 99 | 1.2 |
| Food processing | 31 | 0.4 |
| Marine | 31 | 0.4 |
| Utilities | 29 | 0.4 |
| Process manufacturing | 13 | 0.2 |
| Miscellaneous industry sectors (furnishings, public administration, property services, mining) | 13 | 0.2 |
| Electronics | 9 | 0.1 |
| Transport and distribution | 9 | 0.1 |
| Industry not specified | 1589 | 19.3 |
| **Total** | **8249** | **100.0** |

**Employment and further studies outcomes of SWL participants (March 2000)**

At the time of the survey, one in ten respondents were in part-time work only. Just over 40% were in full-time employment and just over a third were in full-time studies. About 7% of the total group had registered as unemployed and about 2% were not actively seeking work. About the same percentage were engaged in a combination of part-time studies with other activities. These data are reported in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Employment and further training destinations of school leavers who had participated in SWL programs

| | Destinations | No. of students | % of total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Part-time work** | Part-time work only | 842 | |
| | Part-time work and deferred studies | 58 | |
| | **Subtotal** | **902** | **10.9** |
| **Full-time work combinations** | Full-time work | 3169 | |
| | Full-time work and part-time study | 281 | |
| | Full-time work and deferred studies | 68 | |
| | **Subtotal** | **3318** | **40.2** |
| Full-time study combinations | Full-time study only | 2095 | |
| | Full-time study and part-time work | 753 | |
| | Repeating year 12/ undertaking year 13 | 139 | |
| | **Subtotal** | **2987** | **36.2** |
| Other study combinations | Repeating year 12/undertaking year 13 and part-time work | 21 | |
| | Part-time work and part-time study | 173 | |
| | Part-time study only | 86 | |
| | **Subtotal** | **280** | **3.4** |
| Unemployed | Registered as unemployed (no part-time work) | 549 | |
| | Registered as unemployed and part-time studies | 29 | |
| | Registered as unemployed and deferred studies | 25 | |
| | Registered as unemployed and part-time work | 2 | |
| | **Subtotal** | **605** | **7.3** |
| Not actively seeking work | Not registered as unemployed but not seeking work | 118 | |
| | Not registered as unemployed, not seeking work, and deferred studies | 11 | |
| | Not registered as unemployed, not seeking work, and in part-time studies | 3 | |
| | Deferred studies and not in work | 27 | |
| | **Subtotal** | **159** | **1.9** |
| | **Grand total** | **8249** | **100.0** |

### 1999 grade levels

The March 2000 destinations of SWL participants indicate that the majority of respondents who had undertaken years 12 and 13 (40.9%, 46.3% respectively) in 1999 were slightly more likely to be in full-time work than those who had undertaken year 11 (37.4%). Year 11 school leavers were more likely to be in full-time studies (42.5%) than respondents in the other two groups. Unemployment levels for both years 11 and 12 school leavers were similar (7.1%, 7.4% respectively). In addition, there were very few (3.0, n=2) year 13 school leavers in unemployment.

**Gender**

About a tenth of all males and females were engaged in part-time work. However, where almost a half of the males (49.0%) were in full-time work or a combination of full-time work with other activities, just under a third (32.7%) of the females were so engaged. A similar proportion of males and females were registered as unemployed (7.7%, 7.0% respectively), or as not actively seeking work (1.5%, 2.3% respectively). However a greater proportion of the female respondents were in full-time studies than were males (42.1%, 29.8% respectively).

**Senior certificate completers**

There were 67.6% of respondents who had completed their senior secondary certificates. Of these, just over half (55.6%) were female, 44.2% were male and a small group did not state their gender.

There was virtually no difference in the profile of students who had or had not completed their senior certificate, including the proportion registered as unemployed (7.3% for both groups). Those who had not completed their senior certificate were slightly more likely to progress to full-time study than those who had completed their certificates (39.2%, 34.9% respectively) and slightly more likely to be in work (40.4%, 40.2% respectively).

**SWL program participation**

It is important to consider the success of SWL programs in generating work outcomes. The findings of this study indicate that greater percentages of respondents who have undertaken SWL programs in traditional trades like metals and engineering, light manufacturing, building and construction and primary industries, obtain full-time employment at higher rates than students undertaking other SWL programs. However, just over a quarter of the students who had undertaken SWL programs in all other programs were also obtaining full-time employment.

The proportion of the sample reporting as registered as unemployed was fairly similar for the great majority of respondents. The major differences were to be found for programs in community services and health, where the rate was 13.5%, and the programs for tourism, where unemployment was considerably lower at 4.3%. SWL participants not 'actively seeking work' were minimal for the great majority of programs. SWL participants in light manufacturing, metals and engineering and arts and entertainment reported the highest figures for this group. The two areas most likely to lead on to full-time study were IT (54.7%) and tourism (53.2%). These details are provided in Table 3.

**Table 3:** March 2000 destinations of respondents according to participation in SWL industry programs (%)

| SWL program (industry sector) | Part-time work | Full-time work | Registered as un-employed | Not actively seeking work | Full-time studies | Other study combinations | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hospitality | 14.6 | 36.5 | 6.8 | 2.1 | 35.7 | 4.3 | 100.0 n=1949 |
| Office/finance/ banking/ insurance | 10.0 | 42.4 | 7.7 | 2.9 | 33.4 | 3.6 | 100.0 n=887 |
| Retail/wholesale | 12.3 | 34.8 | 7.7 | 3.0 | 41.2 | 1.0 | 100.0 n=600 |
| Building and construction | 8.7 | 65.7 | 6.6 | .6 | 16.7 | 1.4 | 100.0 n=496 |
| Community services/health | 13.1 | 26.5 | 13.5 | 2.2 | 41.2 | 3.3 | 100.0 n=497 |
| Metals engineering | 6.8 | 57.9 | 9.0 | 1.3 | 22.9 | 2.3 | 100.0 n=497 |
| IT/ printing/ communication | 6.3 | 26.2 | 7.4 | 1.7 | 54.7 | 3.7 | 100.0 n=408 |
| Automotive | 9.0 | 60.8 | 6.2 | .4 | 22.1 | 1.5 | 100.0 n=390 |
| Primary industries | 11.3 | 41.2 | 0.0 | 3.5 | 33.3 | 10.7 | 100.0 n=318 |
| Light manufacturing | 11.1 | 52.9 | 9.1 | 1.4 | 23.1 | 2.9 | 100.0 n=209 |
| Tourism | 11.8 | 24.6 | 4.3 | 1.1 | 53.2 | 4.8 | 100.0 n=186 |
| Fitness sport and recreation | 14.3 | 35.3 | 7.5 | 1.5 | 36.1 | 5.3 | 100.0 n=133 |
| Arts and entertainment | 9.1 | 32.3 | 7.1 | 9.1 | 40.4 | 2.0 | 100.0 n=99 100.0 |

### Comparisons with ABS statistics

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS Labour Force Australia 6203.0) reports that the proportion of 15-19 year olds who left school and were in full-time work in March 2000 was 32.2%. The proportion in part-time work (and not in full-time study) was 12.5%. The proportion attending full-time tertiary study was 39.1%. However, for participants in our sample, the proportion in full-time work was 40.2%; part-time work - 10.9%; and full-time study - 36.2%.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates that at March 2000, there was an unemployment rate of 16.8% for the proportion of 15-19 year olds attending neither school nor a tertiary educational institution full-time.

For comparison purposes for our study, the unemployment rate in Table 6 needs to be calculated for those employed in full or part-time work or looking for work. On this basis, the SWL leavers unemployment rate is 12.1%.

**Finding jobs in industry**

Employed respondents were asked to indicate their occupations, the types of jobs they were involved in and their place of employment. A total of about 27 different industry areas were identified. The largest specified industry group, accounting for just over 15% of the total group of respondents, was the retail/wholesale industry. The next largest group was the hospitality industry, which accounted for about 11% of the respondents.

Almost a third (29.6%) of all workers were in the retail/wholesale industry and just over a fifth (22.1%) were in the hospitality industry. For the other industries the number of workers drops down dramatically.

**Finding employment in SWL industry sectors**

Although this it is just one of the benefits of SWL program participation, it is also important to consider whether this participation leads on to occupations in the same areas. The findings indicate that whether students obtain employment in the SWL industry sectors varies according to the SWL program involved. Of the students who had undertaken at least one SWL program, there were 1971 students who reported they had found jobs in the same industry sectors. For the more popular SWL programs (over 99 participants), the best outcomes in terms of SWL program and industry match were for students who had undertaken SWL programs in building and construction, automotive, retail/wholesale, and utilities. Successful SWL program/industry employment matches ranged from about 30% for participants in SWL programs in the utilities sector, to just over 40% for participants in SWL programs for the building and construction sector.

Almost a third of those who had undertaken SWL programs in hospitality, marine, metals and engineering, office/finance/banking/insurance, and primary industries, chose or found jobs in these industry sectors in 2000. About a fifth of those who had undertaken programs in light manufacturing, food processing, transport and distribution, community services and health chose or found employment in these areas.

About a tenth of the SWL participants in information technology/printing and communication, fitness sport and recreation, electronics, tourism, arts and entertainment had been able to find jobs in these industry sectors.

This analysis in terms of the numbers of respondents in full-time or part-time work reveals that the following proportions of SWL participants had been able to find jobs in the same industry sectors:

- almost nine in ten participants in retail/wholesale

- almost two-thirds of participants in building and construction and hospitality
- about half of participants in primary industries, automotive, office, finance, banking and insurance, metals and engineering, and community services and health
- well over a third of participants in light manufacturing, and information technology, printing and communication
- over a quarter of participants in tourism, fitness, sport and recreation and arts and entertainment.

About a third (36.4%) of the respondents and almost a half (46.3%) of those in full-time and part-time work reported finding jobs in industries other than those in which they had undertaken SWL programs.

**Obtaining a job with work placement employer**

About 10% of respondents reported that they had obtained a job with their work placement employer. This represents 21.4% of those respondents whose major activity was part-time or full-time work.

In the more popular industry programs (undertaken by 99 respondents or over), the industries more likely to keep on students as full-time employees after their work placements were building and construction, metals and engineering, and automotive and tourism.

The proportion of those who were kept on by work placement employers rises dramatically when only the numbers of those in full-time and part-time work are taken into account. It ranges from 9.0% for employers in the fitness, sport and recreation industry to just over 35% for those in the tourism industry. For eight of the industry areas with 99 respondents or over, the percentage of those who have been kept on by their employers ranges from just over 22% to just over 35%.

**Utility of work placements for further employment**

One in ten (10.1%) respondents had undertaken a work placement with their current employer. Of these, just over three-quarters (79.2%) believed that the work placement they had done in their year 11, 12 or 13 program at secondary school had helped them to get the job. Just over a fifth (20.8%), however, did not believe that the placement had helped them to get the job.

However, 43.8% of all respondents who were in some form of full-time or part-time work combinations replied that their work placements had helped them to find a job. In addition, 58.2% of those in apprenticeships and just 53% of those in traineeships believed that their work placement had helped them to get their current jobs.

**Moving to other areas for employment**

Nearly a fifth (16.4%) of those who reported being in part-time work or full-time work reported having left their local area to find a job.

## Apprenticeships and traineeships

There were 13.7% of school leavers who had gone into apprenticeships, and 9.9% who had gone into traineeships.

### Grade level background of apprentices and trainees

A greater percentage of apprentices were respondents who had completed year 11 in 1999. However, the greatest percentage of trainees had completed year 12 in 1999. In addition there were more 1999 year 11 and 12 respondents who were in apprenticeships than traineeships. The situation was reversed for students who had completed year 13.

### SWL program participation of apprentices and trainees

Well over a third of the participants in the major SWL programs (ie automotive, building and construction, and metals and engineering), were in apprenticeships at the time of the study, with over a half of those who had taken programs in building and construction reporting an apprenticeship. About a tenth of the participants in SWL programs in retail/wholesale, community services and health and information technology/printing and communication were in traineeships. However, almost a fifth of participants in office/finance/banking and insurance programs were in traineeships.

Well over a third (42.5%) of trainees and just over half (53.7%) of apprentices were working in the industry areas related to their SWL programs.

### Credit transfer or advanced standing

There were 28.4% of apprentices and 19.1% of trainees who had received advanced standing or credit transfer for their SWL programs. However, apprentices who had participated in SWL programs in automotive, building and construction, hospitality, metals and engineering, and primary industries were far more likely to receive advanced standing in their apprenticeship training than apprentices participating in other SWL programs. Trainees were more likely to receive advanced standing if they had studied SWL programs in information technology, printing and communication, office, banking and insurance, automotive industries and metals and engineering.

A greater percentage of apprentices who had participated in SWL programs in automotive, building and construction, hospitality, metals and engineering, and primary industries - and who had obtained employment in the same sector - received advanced standing than apprentices in most industries. However, the great majority of apprentices and trainees did not receive any advanced standing for SWL programs undertaken in secondary school.

### Training institutions

Over two-thirds (66.5%) of those who reported being engaged in further studies (n=3580) had gone into VET institutions and about a quarter (25.4%) had gone on to university. There was a small group that had returned to high schools or secondary colleges either to repeat year 12 or undertake year 13.

About a fifth (21.4%) of the respondents who had gone on to further studies after their SWL programs reported having been awarded credit transfer or advanced standing. However, over a third (39.3%) of those who had gone into a course related to their SWL program reported that credit transfer had been awarded.

## Discussion and conclusions

This study has examined the post-school destinations of students participating in SWL programs in their final years of schooling. Only a small percentage of SWL participants were registered as unemployed, which is below national levels generally. The findings also indicate that a substantial group (over 40%) of SWL participants are also gaining full-time employment. In addition, over 38% are continuing on to further and full-time studies.

### The connection between SWL and destinations

It is always difficult to make direct connections between participation in training and successful employment or other outcomes. However, these are optimistic findings. They support the importance of SWL for preparing students for the world of work. Students do not always choose or obtain jobs in the industry sector related to their SWL programs, however, they may use the experience to choose and gain employment in other industry sectors. In addition, the extensive range of programs makes it possible for students to have a substantial choice in the careers or industries they would like to pursue. This study does not capture the reasons why students choose employment in other industry sectors. However, findings may indicate that students have developed generic workplace skills which have led to jobs in other areas.

The fact that the substantial groups of respondents indicated that work placements had helped them to obtain jobs supports the benefit to students and employers of having students in workplaces.

For some industry sectors there seems to be a tighter connection between SWL program participation and eventual employment in the industry. For example, about half of the SWL participants in the building and construction area managed to get employment in this industry sector. If we take these as a percentage of those who went into full-time and part-time work, then this figure is close to two-thirds of the participants. Tight connections are also found for the retail/wholesale area. Here, almost 90% of those who found work in the retail/wholesale industry had participated in SWL programs in the same industry sector. The connections are not as strong for most of the other major programs.

### A diversity of offerings

The study has highlighted the wide variety of industry programs that are available. Such a diversity of offerings provides a great deal of opportunity for students to experience the different industries and to change their minds if they do not enjoy a particular area.

**Encouraging results**

Apart from the success of SWL participants in finding employment or continuing with further training, the figures are encouraging for specific groups of SWL program participants in terms of finding jobs in the same industry sectors. In SWL programs like building and construction, retail/wholesale, hospitality, automotive, utilities, primary industries, marine and metals and engineering, and office/finance/banking and insurance, substantial percentages of students chose or gained jobs in the same areas in which they had undertaken SWL training. In addition, a substantial proportion were able to enter new apprenticeships. In less popular programs like property services, where only two students undertook SWL programs, both students obtained a job in the same area. This information is a valuable tool for students when making their course selections and when considering career options.

In addition, there were low proportions of respondents who were registered as unemployed or who were not actively seeking work. This means that SWL participants are either going into full-time or part-time work or into full or part-time studies. These are positive findings and indicate that SWL participants are still engaged with the labour force or with the training sector.

**Credit transfer and advanced standing**

About a third of students who went on to VET programs at TAFE or other VET providers or their equivalents received credit for their SWL courses. This also augurs well for the continuation of these programs. If students know that their prior learning in SWL programs will be counted towards further qualifications, then it adds further motivation for students to take these programs seriously.

It remains a matter of concern, however, that the great majority of students, whether they go on to study in similar areas at universities or in VET institutions, are not receiving recognition for the studies they have already completed. There may be a number of reasons for students not obtaining advanced standing. One reason may relate to communication problems between the training providers, which may lead to a lack of understanding of what actual learning has preceded requests for credit transfer. Another reason for credit transfer or advanced standing not being widespread may be that apprentices, trainees and other students are not aware that they can make a request for advanced standing and this lack of knowledge may explain the limited take-up of credit transfer opportunities. Furthermore, apprentices, trainees and other students may not make requests for credit transfer or advanced standing because they may prefer to start afresh in their new programs.

Should lack of adequate information for both parties be the major barrier to accessing credit transfer or advanced standing, then information which clarifies the availability to students of credit transfer and advanced standing, and information which clarifies program content for RTOs, needs to be more widely distributed.

**Limitations of the study**

This study has examined employment and further training outcomes of students who had participated in SWL programs during their final years of schooling, and who responded to a pilot survey. This information has been provided by students

completing a questionnaire and having this forwarded to the ECEF via coordinators or teachers. The findings need to be considered in this light. It could be that only students with successful outcomes have participated in the survey, and this may have contributed to some of the favourable results.

## Concluding remarks

The findings of this study indicate that the great majority of students who have participated in SWL programs are obtaining employment or going into further studies. This augurs well for the continuation of such programs. However, we must be careful not to automatically conclude that these employment and further training outcomes are directly caused by participation in SWL programs. It may be that the more enterprising students also see the advantages of undertaking SWL programs, and because of these specific attributes, are also reaping the rewards.

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